



SOUTH FLORIDA WATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT

OPINION

January 29, 2016

SFWMD Took Necessary Emergency Action to Provide Flood Protection

The South Florida Water Management District's primary responsibility is to provide flood protection for everyone within the agency's 16-county service area. This week, the District took necessary action to fulfill that mission for thousands of families and businesses around Lake Okeechobee.

On Jan. 27, South Florida experienced its wettest January day in 25 years. Glades communities south of the lake saw particularly intense short-term rainfall – 6 inches in 24 hours – overwhelming the local flood control system. As a result, water managers “back pumped” water into Lake Okeechobee to provide necessary relief.

The SFWMD Governing Board essentially ended the routine practice of back pumping into the lake years ago, except under emergency conditions clearly defined by a Florida Department of Environmental Protection permit. In fact, there have been only eight other back pumping events using the permitted process since 2008. Today, this truly is a rare occurrence.

This winter is proving challenging for water managers who must balance flood control with protecting vital ecological areas such as the Caloosahatchee Estuary. In January, the region well exceeded its record rainfall total for the month, including more than *six times* the historical average for the Caloosahatchee Basin alone. District water managers have already maximized the amount of water that can be sent south to the Everglades or stored in regional or dispersed water management projects, prompting the extraordinary actions taken this week.

More water storage capacity is clearly needed to protect both South Florida's residents, businesses and visitors and the environment. The District continues to work toward long-term solutions, such as construction of the C-43 Reservoir. The best way to help is by supporting either Governor Scott's proposed budget or the “Legacy Florida” bill filed in the Florida House to provide a long-term, dedicated funding source to complete these critical projects.

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South Florida Water Management District*